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Keeping each other in mind



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

BACK TO NORMAL

Master Sgt. Jerry Knight returned from a tour in Kirkush, Iraq, in November 2004. He and his wife, Cathy, visited friends and family in the Meridian area over the holidays — and did a little shopping at local stores for clothes that weren't the color of sand.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

TRAINING EXERCISE

Master Sqt. Jerry Knight's first job during his time in Kirkush, Iraq, was training members of the New Iraqi Army. "After that, we took on the mission of training Iraqi police officers in building entry and room-clearing techniques," Jerry said. "It was very rewarding work. These officers were already performing these duties in the field without any training at all, so we started at square one and built them up to be efficient teams."

JERRY'S THOUGHTS

Master Sgt. Jerry Knight has been home from Iraq for almost four months now. In civilian life, he is a special agent for the Department of Homeland Security - and he resumed monthly drills with the U.S. Army Reserve in January. Here are his thoughts about the time he spent in Iraq.

Overall, my tour in Iraq was good. I was fortunate to have been able to be part of a team that played such a large part in the development of the New Iraqi Army leadership.

The team I had was excellent and the Iraqi soldiers were dedicated to the task of becoming key leaders.

I missed my wife and kids every single day I was there. I can't remember one day that went by when I didn't think of them and wonder if I would see them again.

My wife, Cathy, was a true trooper while I was gone. She took on all my chores and then some. She kept the house running smoothly and made certain that I knew she was at home thinking about me. I received a care package from her nearly every week I was

in country. She spent every extra penny she earned to make certain I had everything I needed. If there is a medal for troop support and hometown patriotism, she's earned it and then

I was in a relatively safe place but, then again, no place is safe in Iraq. I will truly miss my translator, Zaed, and the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines I served with in Kirkush.

I honestly hope that every soldier who goes to serve in Iraq will come home to their families safe, but I realize that in war and the fight for liberty, there is great sacrifice - and some of our compatriots will be called on to pay the ultimate price. I pray for those brave patriots and their families daily.

- Jerry Knight



THE ZAED-INATOR Master Sgt. Jerry Knight's interpreter in Iraq was a young man named Zaed. "I called him 'the Zaed-inator,' as he would never fail to come to work and would remain as long as you needed him," Jerry said. "He was young, tough and dedicated to his job and his people. I will certainly miss working with him. We still

e-mail back and forth, but it's just not the same."

Staying sane, staying strong, staying home

Cathy Barnette Knight is a 1983 graduate of West Lauderdale High School. She is married to Master Sgt. Jerry Knight of the U.S. Army Reserve, who deployed to Iraq in January 2004.

While Cathy waited at home in Omaha, Neb., she kept a scrapbook of Jerry's experiences. She said the project kept her hands busy and made her feel closer to her husband.

Jerry returned home Nov. 7, 2004. This is the story he and Cathy wrote together for "Profile 2005: A Letter from Home." It begins right after Cathy dropped Jerry off at Fort Lewis in Seattle, Wash., as he waited to board a plane bound for Iraq.

"Thanks for the opportunity to tell our own piece of the story," Cathy said. "So many of our family and friends back home in Mississippi prayed for us, and supported us both during his deployment. It meant so much to me during a very difficult time."

By Cathy Knight

special to The Star

Once I returned home from Ft. Lewis, I was kept up to date on troop movement of Jerry's unit by a designated contact person at the base. It's hard to explain or understand the feeling of knowing he was at

the hangar waiting for his flight, and then that sinking feeling that overwhelmed me when I got the call that they were finally airborne.

It somehow made it all real. I didn't know how long it would be until I heard from him and knew he had arrived safely in Iraq.

Days turned into weeks and, once they got settled in, he was able to contact me more frequently. I would actually refuse to leave the house for fear I would miss a call.

Soon he started to send photos via e-mail, and they were wonderful gifts. It gave me an opportunity to get a glimpse into his day-to-day life there, it was always good to open an e-mail and see his face; it helped to know he was OK.

Staying busy

A friend suggested I make a scrapbook of his photos, as a new hobby to help keep me busy, as well as a memento of his tour for him to have when he returned.

So I took a couple of classes and started his scrapbook. It actually was a kind of therapy for me to work on this project. On nights when sleep escaped me and my thoughts were with Jerry, I would stay up and work on it. It was comforting to me and made me feel closer to

Time passed slowly. Once the shock wears off, you eventually have to get yourself into a routine. There is always something that needs to be done and all the responsibility of running a household falls

The busier you stay, the easier the time passes. Between two major snowstorms, learning to operate the snow blower, getting to the post office to stand in line to get care packages out every Saturday, learning to do minor repairs on household appliances and figuring out the in-ground sprinkler system, once the spring finally came, keeping busy was never a problem!

The problem was sometimes being so overwhelmed and losing

hope that I could do it all.

At the same time, it was important to assure Jerry that, "Everything here is fine, I've got it all under control," because the last thing he needed to worry about was the laundry room flooding.

Light at the end of the tunnel

But we are truly a team, and we persevered together, we were there for each other on the worst days, even though we were thousands of miles away from one another.

After an extremely disappointing couple of times when he was expected home but was extended, the call finally came that he was

As every wife in this position knows, words cannot explain the feelings and emotions that call brings. Relief, knowing that soon you won't have to worry night and day about his safety, and if he is getting enough to eat, and enough rest

Finally, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Jerry arrived back in Omaha, Neb., on Nov. 7, 2004, and I have never been happier to see anyone in my whole life. Just to hold him was surreal, I couldn't believe he was really here.

We have truly been blessed. All the prayers were answered and he made it back safe and sound, but not a day goes by that we both don't think about the soldiers who do not return.

We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to them for their sacrifices, as

well as the sacrifices of the families they leave behind. Sign me one very proud Army soldier's wife. HooHa!



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

SOLDIER'S SCRAPBOOK

Cathy Knight looks through a scrapbook she made of her husband's Iraqi tour. "On nights when sleep escaped me and my thoughts were with Jerry, I would stay up and work on it," she said. "It was comforting to me and made me feel closer to him."